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FM AMEMBASSY SARAJEVO
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INFO AMEMBASSY BUDAPEST PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SARAJEVO 000371

SIPDIS

DS/IP/EUR, DS/ISS/ITA, EUR/EX, EUR/SCE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/24/2018
TAGS: [AEMR](#) [AMGT](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [KFLO](#) [MARR](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: TFKV01: SARAJEVO EAC MEETING, FEBRUARY 24, 2008

Classified By: CDA JUDITH CEFKIN FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador chaired a core EAC on 02/24/08 to review the status of the Banja Luka Branch Office (BLBO) which has been closed since 02/21/08. The EAC agreed that the BLBO should remain closed with a review of the decision on 02/26/08. The EAC also agreed that although the BLBO will not be officially open 02/25/08, and pending Washington's approval, a POL Officer should be sent to Banja Luka to attend meetings with Republika Srpska officials on Monday 2/25/08. EAC agreed that RSO personnel should also remain in Banja Luka until further notice. End Summary.

¶2. (C) While the weekend was quiet in Banja Luka, the EAC noted that demonstrations in Banja Luka and other cities in the Republika Srpska have gone on without permits and protests can be expected to occur unannounced at anytime. The primary organizers for these demonstrations are student groups from the Universities and various NGO's lead by the Serb Movement of NGO Associations (SPONA). SPONA reportedly announced that it considers itself "in a constant state of protest through March 2008". Police expect that 30,000 or more will demonstrate on Tuesday 2/26/08 in the center of Banja Luka. Reportedly SPONA and or others are busing protesters from around the RS to participate in the next round of demonstrations. RSO is coordinating closely with Police and will ensure that increased police coverage is present.

¶3. (C) Due to the unannounced violent student protests that led to the evacuation of the BLBO on 2/21/08, and in view of expected mass demonstrations planned in Banja Luka for 02/26/08, the EAC concurred that the BLBO should remain closed. The decision to reopen the BLBO will be predicated by the security environment present and violence displayed during the protests in the upcoming days. Protesters are expected to be bussed into Banja Luka in great number for the upcoming demonstrations against Kosovo's independence from Serbia. The level of local police response towards potential protester actions against the international community's facilities in Banja Luka will be a significant determining factor in the reopening of the BLBO. As a precautionary measure no local guards will be present at the BLBO on 02/26/08 and RSO personal in Banja Luka will stay inside the RS Ministry of Interior headquarters.

¶4. (C) Post has prepared an updated Warden Notice to be posted to the Embassy website and released to the official American community once cleared by Washington. Notice will advise of the ongoing closure of the BLBO. It will also note the possibility of demonstrations occurring in other areas and advise American citizens to avoid areas where demonstrations are occurring. All official travel to Banja Luka must be cleared by the EXEC office. The same advisory will be shared with Mission staff. As always, EAC will continue to closely monitor the situation and revise security measures and update Warden Notices as situation warrants.

CEFKIN